

Know Your Combat Jets

A software review by Major David M. Dodge

Know Your Combat Jets is a CD-ROM-based learning system for visual aircraft recognition. This CD-ROM is not a flight simulator, or video game, but a true training/educational product. But don't let that fool you. You can be entertained while you learn. The product is well put together and will not disappoint you when it is installed. I just wish learning math was this much fun. The program covers all the major combat jets currently flying throughout the world. They are broken down by major region, such as U.S., NATO, Russian and close affiliations of those.

I installed the program and immediately launched into "Challenge" mode. I have a weakness in some of the newer Russian aircraft, and picked the swing wing category. I was not only challenged, I was "sucked-in" for 90 minutes, learning the specific recognition features of each similar type of aircraft. The program doesn't give the answers away. You must select the correct response. It does lead you through the process of self-discovery, which is more interesting and one which I prefer. When you answer incorrectly, a firm male voice tells you that you have made an error and then displays the selection you made next to the one you are trying to identify. This continues until you give up, learn the differences, or guess the right answer. You can't help but learn the material, and it truly is a challenge.

You first start *Axia Jets* from the program group which has four entries: *Axia Jets*, *Axia Air Show*, *How to use Axia*, and a *read.me* file. I highly recommend starting out running through the "How to use *Axia*" program first. This is essentially a tutorial on how to use the learning system, and it is an excellent demonstration of the features and how to use them. I wished I had started there, instead of launching into the challenge mode, though this is not bad either. Discovery is another form of learning too. *Axia* knows that as well, and calls that feature "Explore" mode. The interface is pretty intuitive, which leads one to configure the screen the way you want, depending on your preferences.

The main program, *Axia Jets*, is detail rich. The program is broken down into four categories: Structural, Combat Role, Red Alert, and Affiliation. These are further divided into sub-categories that break out the key recognition features. Red Alert, for example, is broken down into Missiles, Action, Multivariants, and Scramble, each with a different learning focus. There are even video clips of some of the missiles.

The dominant focus of the interface is that you can display jets in side-by-side

view or arrange another view of a different jet or the same jet. There are plan views as well as silhouette views. This takes flashcards to a whole new dimension. The pictures are full color, and there are some video clips that you must recognize. There are at least three or four different versions of photos for every aircraft, which helps break the rote memory drills and really reinforces the knowledge and key recognition points. There are other neat details too. You can zoom a picture to get a better view. The Labels button activates visual flags on the image that point out key recognition features. Each aircraft has a summarized history and technical data feature. Performance charts are included that differ from the usual charts by combining performance characteristics into one "quick glance" format.

For those stubborn training challenges, you can build subsets which allow you to build customized lists of the larger groups, so as to focus on those aircraft. The incremental learning feature allows you to step through a set of five (default) aircraft. When you gain proficiency on one, it drops out and is replaced by another. It dynamically configures the list to your proficiency. The *Axia Jet* icon is probably the one you will use the most.

Axia Airshow is the aficionado's dream. This is a slide show of all the aircraft images on the disk in ground or aerial shots. I would guess there are over several hundred, including video clips. There is coverage of over 85 variants of more than 60 major airframes, so this collection is extensive, including the new Taiwanese and Spanish aircraft. If you like Mirages, there are plenty of them as well. If you wanted an impressive screen saver, this would be a good choice, but you would always have a crowd gathered around your desk looking at the changing images.

I have found myself losing track of time whenever I start the program. It is like an artichoke. You peel back a layer and find another, except *Axia Jets* lets you go back to the start and try again. I truly wish this technology had been available when I was training soldiers in aircraft recognition. My job would have been to manage the time with the computer instead of keeping people awake. Even today, with high-tech graphics and video, this program will hold your attention longer than the usual class period. I felt I should be smart enough to



beat the computer, but even when you lose, you still learn, because the program is structured to keep you from becoming discouraged. Even if you do become discouraged with your own progress, there is still enough on this CD-ROM to entertain.

What about hardware? *Axia* recommends a 486SX or compatible CPU with 8 megabytes of RAM, a double speed CD-ROM drive (MPC compliant), 16-bit SVGA card, MCI compatible sound card (e.g., Soundblaster or other), and 4 megabytes of available hard drive space for program installation. The program runs under Windows 3.1. I had no problems using the program, but I had to wait a bit for screen redraws from the CD-ROM. The double speed drive would be an absolute minimum I would recommend, and you may want to consider a quad speed drive. A video card with more than 1 megabyte of video memory would also help.

Is *Axia's Know your Combat Jets* for everyone? If you want thrills from air combat simulation, like *F16 Falcon*, probably not. If you want to learn more about the world's combat jets, this is just the program, and it also makes a very good quick reference as well. If you have a need for REAL aircraft recognition training, then this program is exactly what you are looking for. *Axia's Know Your Combat Jets* is a very well structured learning tool that is professionally put together to give you education and entertainment in a new perspective.

Know Your Combat Jets by Axia International Inc., Suite 900, 10201 Southport Road S.W., Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2W 4X9; Tel 1-800-969-2942, Com1 (403) 258-5870, Fax: (403) 258-5871. \$29.95.

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